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AUTHOR Briney, Margorie; Long, James S.
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ABSTRACT

This 1984 study (1) estimated the more enduring benefits of a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) prevocational program for those who completed the program in 1979; and (2) identified the features of the CETA program that completers recalled as having contributed to these benefits. The 18-week CETA prevocational program was offered by a community college for economically disadvantaged adults in an agricultural/industrial community of 55,000. The program included personal development, basic academic skills, and job skills and career planning. The researcher, who was also the CETA program coordinator in 1979, interviewed 19 of the 23 program completers by telephone. She searched for four kinds of anticipated benefits in their lives: economic (finding and keeping a job); educational (further schooling); personal (feelings of greater confidence, self-worth, ability to communicate); and social (membership in organizations, participation in community and government). The results of the survey showed that 10 persons were employed full-time, 5 part-time, and 2 were full-time students; before the 1979 program all were unemployed. The changes related to education showed that 1 person had completed high school, 7 had completed a high school equivalency program, 9 had taken vocational training, and 11 had taken college classes for credit. All but one of those contacted were more confident, and almost all reported a greater sense of self-worth, and better communications. In addition, 10 who had belonged to no organizations before the program had since joined a group. (This paper contains extensive advice on survey methodology.) (KC)

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Adults Remember What's Important*

Introduction

This 1984 study (1) estimated the more enduring benefits of a CETA prevocational program for those who completed the program five years earlier, in 1979, and (2) identified the features of the CETA program that completers recalled as having contributed to those benefits.

The 18 week CETA prevocational program was offered by a community college for economically disadvantaged adults in an agricultural/industrial community of 55,000. The program included three areas:

- personal development (coping skills, interpersonal relationships, time and stress management, decision making, personal appearance, values clarification),
- basic, academic skills, and
- job skills and career planning.

Adult participants were considered "employees;" they were paid a minimum wage and expected to start "work" on time and complete a full day.

The researcher, Margorie Briney, was also the CETA program coordinator in 1979. She searched for your kinds of anticipated benefits in the lives of the CETA program completers:

- economic (finding and keeping a job)
- educational (further schooling)
- personal (feelings of greater confidence, self worth, ability to communicate)
- social (membership in organizations, participation in community and government)

She attempted to associate these more enduring positive changes in the participants' lives to qualities of the CETA program in 1979.

Findings are summarized in an attachment.

Kinds of expected benefits had been established by the program objectives; contributory qualities of the program, however, were identified by the respondents.

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*Presentation by Margorie Briney, Walla Walla Community College in Clarkston, Washington and Jim Long, Washington State Cooperative Extension, at the panel on "Utilizing Qualitative Methods and Procedures," ENet/'85, Toronto, October 1985.

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Methodology, Some Thumb Rules

A. Sources of data

1. Secondary data (college and labor records about employment and education) can establish benchmarks for program participants, and help validate researcher's and respondents' recall of changes.

2. Program quidelines can identify expected outcomes (kinds of benefits).

3. To draw data from only program completers -- and excludrf those who dropped out -- is effective when the purpose is to estimate levels of benefit and associate benefits to qualities of the program that are important to those who experienced the full range of program activities.

4. Contacting respondents takes time, creativity, persistance and an incremental, "home grown" approach that fits the participants' social network: college record -- local phone book -- phone director assistance -- local relatives/friends/fellow participants -- current resident at participants' former home -- advertisement in local "shopper!"

5. To all contacts on a master list helps trace your efforts.

B. Choice of Data Gatherer

1. Validity can be increased by utilizing an interviewer who knows the program, participants and community, and whom respondents recognize as knowledgeable and as having access to secondary data[1].

2. Being explicit about one's predispositions helps build in come checks. (Marge admitted, for example, that she expected the benefits revealed during the six month evaluation not to persist five years after the program).

C. Data Collection

1. Using semi-structure questions (open-ended questions with plausible alternatives on the interview schedule for the interviewer) helps when clarifying, probing for further information and coding responses.

2. The alternatives themselves can come from program guidelines, the literature and the researcher's own experience as a program coordinator.

3. Layout the format of the interview schedule with lots of room to write.
4. Sequence the questions from neutral/descriptive/historical items to evaluative/associational items (For example, from "What did you do before entering the program?" and "What are you doing now?" to "Do you feel more confidence in your own abilities since the program?" and "Do you remember anything in the program that may have contributed to this?")

5. Emphasizing comparison/contrast-type questions helps clarify.

6. Use the vernacular.

7. 16-20 minute telephone interviews are preferred for flexibility, completeness, internal consistency and cost effectiveness[2].

8. Write responses literally as though you were writing for someone else to read years from now.

9. Audio record the interview, with permission; replay immediately and, as needed, supplement the written notes with a different colored pen.

10. Pre-test the interview schedule with a similar constituency to adapt the schedule and practice the mechanics of writing and making an audio recording.

D. Data Analysis

1. Within each pre-established benefit category, analyze responses by visually charting the participants' recall of things "before", "now" and "in-between".

2. Identify and define the components of the program (as one "in-between" influence) to which the interviewee attributes each benefit.

3. Look for internal consistency, logic of relationships/associations; filter responses through your own knowledge of the program, participants, employers, community...

4. Use responses to early questions to interpret other data about later questions (for example interviewees attributed "social" benefits (discussed later), not so much to the program, but to the intermediate personal benefits of the program (discussed earlier). This made sense to the researcher.)

5. "Play around" a lot with the data to develop categories

of program qualities important to the respondents.

E. Drawing Conclusions

1. Trust participant's perceptions of changes in their own lives. Even if their recollection is not complete, consider what they do, remember -- for it is important.

2. Let the data themselves suggest categories of program qualities: formal, institutionally oriented activities and other, non-formal dimensions important to respondents.

3. Let the logic of the associations that participants make between benefits and program suggest linkages to consider in refining programs in the future for similar constituencies.

F. Developing Recommendations

°Use linkages between perceived benefits and program qualities to

°reaffirm some present design decisions,

°introduce new elements,

°recognize new research questions about other benefits, other program features, other, non-program, influences.

Attachment - Findings*

In 1979, 23 adults completed an 18 week CETA prevocational program offered by Walla Walla Community College in Clarkston, Washington.

Twenty were contacted and 19 were interviewed in 1984; their economic status them and now is shown below:

	Before the 1979 program	1984
Employed full-time	0	10
Employed part-time	3	5
Full-time student	0	2*
Unemployed	20	3

*includes one full-time homemaker not on public assistance.

The changes related to education are as follows:

	Before 1979	Since 1979
High school diploma	14	1
G.E.D.	1	7
Vocational training	4	9
College classes for credit	3	11
Job-related workshops	0	3
Personal enrichment	0	3

Personal benefits included:

	Yes	No	Sometimes	Same	Don't Know
More confident	18	1			
Greater self-worth	17	1	1		
Better communications	15	1	1	2	
Get along better	8	4	1	5	1

One indicator of social benefit was that 10 had belonged to no organizations before the program and had since joined a group.

*Margorie Briney, "Five-year Follow-up of Completers of a CETA Prevocational Program," Masters of Adult and continuing education, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington. 1984

Program completers attributed these more enduring changes in their lives to qualities of the CETA program which they identified, specifically:

- °interaction with staff (13)
- °interaction with a diverse group of fellow participants (12)
- °classroom training (10)
- °career exploration (8)
- °self examination (7)
- °influence of a single individual (7)
- °demand for regularity (6)
- °Life Work Planning Class (6)
- °Speech Class (5)
- °completing a G.E.D. (4)
- °finishing something (4)
- °discovering that others have similar problems (3)

Interviewees recalled features of the CETA program with accurate, vivid detail even five years afterwards.

They logically linked positive changes in their lives to program features; some tended, as well, to distinguish other, non-program influences on positive life changes.

Footnotes

1. Flynn-MacPherson, Terese, A Naturalistic Evaluation of the Family Community Leadership Program. Masters of Adult and Continuing Education Thesis , Washington State University, August, 1985.

   Found that respondents tended to disclose more information to a trusted FCL staff member than to an "outsider."

2. Zornitsky, Jeffrey J., et. al. Designing and Implementing Local Follow-up System. Boston, Massachusettes State Department of Manpower Development, 1981.

   Compared mail survey, personal visit interviews and telephone interviews with trainees and concluded that, on the basis of response rate, completeness, internal consistency and cost, the telephone interview is preferred.

Margorie Briney is an instructor at Walla Walla Community College -- at its Clarkston, Washington campus. Through an adult learning center, she coordinates contracted prevocational employment programs. She completed her Masters of Adult and Continuing Education at WSU in 1984.

Jim Long is Evaluation Specialist with Cooperative Extension in Washington State. He completed a professional study leave on Extension program evaluation in 1983, having studied at West Virginia University and interviewed in a number of the states. He also teaches in WSU's Adult and Continuing Education Program and, in that capacity, worked with Marge Briney, co-author. Jim completed his Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies at University of Wisconsin -- a long time ago!